

Geraei to get a last shot at Paris ticket



Iranian Greco-Roman wrestler Mohammadali Geraei (red) is seen in action during a national team training session in Tehran on May 11, 2024. ● IWF

Sports Desk

Greco-Roman wrestler Mohammadali Geraei will make a late tilt at a place in the Iranian squad at the Paris Olympics when taking part at the Polyák Imre & Varga János Memorial tournament – starting June 6 in Budapest. The three-time world bronze medalist will be joined by fellow-Iranian Mohammadreza Mokhtari in the UWW Ranking Series event. Should either of the two wrestlers win the gold medal in Budapest, he will get a shot at the Olympic 77kg berth against fellow-Iranian Amin Kavianejad on June 23, the Iranian Wrestling Federation announced on Saturday. A silver medalist in last October's Asian Games, Kavianejad secured the 77kg slot for the country at the Asian Olympic qualification event in Bishkek in April as Iran became the first country to complete a full set of six Greco-Roman quotas for the

showpiece in the French capital. A single victory in the domestic trial will be enough for Kavianejad to punch his Paris ticket, with his opponent needing two, the federation said. The news came as a turn of fortunes for 30-year-old Geraei, who had been handed a 12-month ban by the United World Wrestling back in November – due to an incident in last year's World Championships – before the international governing body lifted the punishment in February. The Japan Wrestling Federation had lodged a complaint to the UWW over the Iranian's misconduct during a 67kg bout featuring his younger brother Mohammadreza and Kyotaro Sogabe of Japan in Belgrade. Mohammadreza had a 10-9 advantage over the Japanese but was clearly out of breath in the second period, when Mohammadali threw a bottle of mineral water on the mat to halt the bout, presumably buying the

Iranian some time to restore strength. Mokhtari, meanwhile, will be relieved to get a second chance of Olympic participation after the Iranian federation had initially suspended him "until further notice" in March in the aftermath of a physical altercation with a Turkish opponent in the Yasar Dogu & Vehbi Emre tournament in Antalya. The incident came in the closing stages of a last-four encounter, where Mokhtari, trailing a 7-3 scoreline, complained to the referee over the host's Yuksel Saricicek repeatedly using his arm an elbow when defending the Iranian's attacks, before his frustration eventually led to an exchange of punches and kicks between the two wrestlers. Members from the two camps, including Iranian head coach Hassan Rangraz, as well as the organizing officials had to interfere to end the brawl and both athletes were disqualified afterwards.

Iranians Alamian, Shahsavari seal table tennis berths for Olympics

Sports Desk

Iranian table tennis players Nima Alamian and Neda Shahsavari won a couple of quotas for the country in the singles event of the Paris Olympics in July. In an all-Iranian men's final in the Central Asia Regional Qualification event in Tashkent, Alamian came out on top against his brother Noshad 4-1 (11-4, 5-11, 11-6, 11-8, 11-7) on Sunday to secure a third successive Olympic participation. Nima had beaten Zokhid Kenjaev of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan's Alan Kurmangaliyev to win the group in the Uzbek capital before knockout victories over the host's Shokhrukh Iskandarov and Kirill Ger-

assimenko from Kazakhstan sent him into the final showdown. The triumph was the latest episode in a remarkable eight months for the Iranian, who ended the country's 65-year drought in the Asian Games last October by grabbing the men's team bronze – alongside Noshad and Amirhossein Hodaie – before teaming up with his brother for a third-place finish in the doubles event in Hangzhou. Earlier on Sunday, Iranian girl Shahsavari came from behind twice to beat Kazakhstan's Sarvinoz Mirkadirova 4-3 (4-11, 13-11, 9-11, 11-9, 14-12, 11-13, 13-11) in a thrilling women's singles final in Tashkent. A clean sweep of three wins had seen Shahsavari top the

group before she defeated fellow-Iranian Mahshid Ashtari 4-3 for a place in the final.

Noshad on course

Despite Sunday's defeat, the older of the Alamian brothers remains in contention for an Olympic berth through the ITTF Men's Singles World Ranking. The left-handed Iranian moved up by 17 spots – the second highest in the top 60 – to stand 51st in the latest world ranking, thanks to a decent run in the Saudi Smash in Riyadh earlier in May, where Noshad rallied past world No. 4 Liang Jingkun from China in five games, before his campaign came to an end against Chinese teenager Lin Shidong in the round of 16.



Nima Alamian, pictured at last year's Asian Games in Hangzhou, China, will participate at a third successive Olympic Games in Paris. ● XINHUA



Persepolis coach Osmar set for permanent role: Report

Sports Desk

Persepolis interim head coach Osmar Loss Vieira is set to be handed the permanent job on the Persian Gulf Pro League club's bench for the start of the next season, according to IRNA. Having joined the Tehran Reds as an assistant to Yahya Golmohammadi in July 2022, the Brazilian was part of the coaching staff during last season's domestic double-winning campaign and took the caretaker role in January after former head coach parted ways with the club. His appointment drew criticism from sections of the Reds faithful, who were eager to have ex-boss Branko Ivankovic back on the bench – before the Croatian turned down the Persepolis offer – but a run of impressive results and performances has seen Osmar win the supporters over, convincing the club to extend his spell beyond the end of the ongoing campaign. Blessed with the addition of striker Issa Alekasir, Uzbek winger Oston Urunov, and Qatari fullback Abdelkarim Hassan in the winter break, Osmar has steered Persepo-

lis to nine wins in 12 league outings – losing once – though his tactical acumen was questioned when the Reds relinquished a two-goal lead twice before falling to a shootout defeat against Iralco in the Hazfi Cup last 16. IRNA wrote the club board and the 48-year-old Brazilian, whose experience as a head coach had been limited to short stints in his country, have had several meetings in recent days and are expected to agree on a one-year contract in the coming weeks. Chasing a seventh top-flight crown in eight years, Persepolis is second in the league table with 59 points – one adrift of city rival Esteghlal – with three games to spare. The Tehran Reds will play relegation-threatened Esteghlal Khuzestan at home on Tuesday before visiting Shams Azar next Sunday. The final round of league fixtures will see Persepolis welcome Mes Rafsanjan at the Azadi Stadium on May 11. ● ALI SHARIFZADEH/IRNA



Sympathy for Ukraine behind Usyk's heavyweight win, says Fury

REUTERS – Tyson Fury said sympathy for Ukraine was behind the judges' awarding a split-decision victory to Oleksandr Usyk in their heavyweight boxing title fight on Sunday, with the Briton calling for an immediate rematch. After cruising through the middle of the fight, Fury never recovered from a standing eight count in the ninth round, and the judges gave the fight to Usyk, making him the first undisputed heavyweight champion in almost 25 years. "I believe I won that fight. I believe he won a few of the rounds but I won the majority of them His country is at war, and people are siding with the country at war, but make no mistake, I won that fight," Fury said in a post-fight interview in the ring. Ukraine has been fighting a Russian invasion that started more than two years ago. "I'll be back. I've got a rematch clause," the previously undefeated Fury added, with promoter Frank Warren saying in the ring another fight between

the two was a certainty. "That's what the contract says. It's what he wants. It's his call, it's Tyson's call. So whatever he wants to do, it's up to him," Warren said. After an intriguing 12-round battle that saw both men enjoy success, plenty of boxing fans would relish the chance to see the pair go at it again, especially after Usyk managed to turn the tide.

"We'll go back to our families and I'll see him again in October. We'll go back, rest up. I believe I won the fight but I'm not going to sit and cry and make excuses. We'll run it again in October," Fury said. Asked if he would be prepared to face Fury again, Usyk, who did not respond directly to Fury's claim, was unequivocal. "Yes, of course," the 37-year-old Ukrainian said.



Oleksandr Usyk (L) lands a punch on Tyson Fury during a heavyweight unification fight in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on May 19, 2024. ● ACTION IMAGES